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## Editorial

### TENANTS IN RESIDENCE

In a recent public address President Charles Cuthbert Hall, of Union Theological Seminary, employed the expressive phrases "tenants in residence," "tenants in trust," to describe the relation of each succeeding generation on the one side to those who preceded it and on the other to those who are to follow it. The words are aptly expressive of a truth of great importance. Our present possessions, material and spiritual, are almost wholly an inheritance from preceding generations. We are born into a civilization, a government, a literature, an art, a religion that we did not produce, but which are the slowly created product of many centuries. They are ours to use for the brief space of a lifetime, not as owners but as tenants, and at the end of our tenancy not to surrender it, after the fashion of some conscienceless tenants of other people's property, wasted and diminished, but to pass it on to the succeeding generation enhanced in value.

The development of a sense of obligation to those who are to follow us, based on the fact of our receiving something not from them but from those who passed this way before us, is a fairly accurate criterion of the state of civilization that we have reached. To take what has come down to us from the past, consume it and waste it regardless of the welfare of unborn generations is the mark of a savage or of a decadent race. To live for those whom we have not seen, and cannot see; to be willing to sacrifice our own comfort and ease, even life itself, that men coming after us may stand on a higher plane than we ourselves have occupied, may have clearer vision of truth and larger outlook on life—this is a moral achievement of a high order.

To some it may seem unreasonable, quixotic. Yet it is precisely such living as this that most ennobles life, that removes it farthest from that self-centered individualism which is akin to savagery.

The man who after he emerges from infancy lives for himself alone has fallen back into a more than barbaric condition. Few happily fall so low. Some measure of recognition of their own social nature, relations, and obligations, and some response to their demands are almost universal among men. Friends love their friends, parents their children, brothers will fight for their brothers, and warriors for their fellow tribesmen. But the horizon is too often narrow. He who loves his neighbor still hates his enemy, and is indifferent to the pain or want of the man who is not of his tribe. It is here that Christianity has achieved its greatest results, not in making men love one another—they did this before within narrow circles—but in enlarging the circle. "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you," said Jesus. And he added, "For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do this?" It is this teaching and this spirit that have made the woes and needs of every nation under heaven a matter of concern to every Christian people. A famine, whether it be of bread or of truth; cruelty, whether it be for gain or in war, concerns us though it take place in a land we have never seen and never expect to see. The spirit of Christ has given us eyes to see across oceans, as science has given us voices that can speak from land to land.

It is but another step forward in the same direction when we can hear the voice of future generations, and live today for those that presently will fill the places that we now occupy—in short when we can come to regard ourselves as "tenants in residence," living in a world in which it is our privilege and duty so to live that those who after us are tenants shall find the tenement not worse but better adapted to the needs of human life because of our having occupied it.

This conception of life has an important bearing on many problems that face us today, some having to do with material welfare, and some having relation to the spiritual life. It is because, unfortunately, there are still many whose vision is limited to the horizon of their own life that the problem of forest preservation has become an urgent one. That it is being earnestly dealt with not only by statesmen but by men of business is a testimony to the growing sense of the obligation of the present to care for the future.

In the sphere of social ethics regard for the future is a motive of

great significance. Is it enough that we do business as honorably as it was done by a preceding generation? Is it not rather true that he falls short of his opportunity and his duty whose business life does not tend to transmit to the next generation higher ideals and to make traditional methods that more nearly realize the ideal than those which he found in vogue when he entered business life?

But nowhere will the conception of tenancy and obligation to the future be more influential than in the realm of Christian scholarship. Every honestly thinking generation learns some things that were unknown to its predecessors. If those to whom there comes this new truth are concerned only with the men of their own generation, especially if they are thinking chiefly of the older members of it, they will be strongly disposed to keep back that modicum of truth by which they have advanced from the positions of their predecessors. For truth is the servant of life, and when one thinks of the discomfort of soul which for many minds accompanies the process of modifying old conceptions in the sphere of religion, one can but question whether on the whole the gain that will result from the presentation and advocacy of new ideas is enough to compensate for this discomfort. But when one reflects that only by such presentation, even though it be disturbing to some minds, can progress be made from generation to generation, and when one compares the present state of the world's intelligence with that of a few centuries ago and reflects that all advance has been made precisely by each generation making its own contribution, perhaps small, perhaps disquieting, to the forward movement, then it becomes clear that to future generations if not to our own, we owe it to learn what we can, and what we learn, to speak out in love and discretion, but without fear.

It is by motives such as this that many men of the present generation are being moved. They are working under the inspiration of a sense of obligation to serve their own day and generation, and the generations yet unborn. Having received it may be five, it may be two, talents, they are concerned that they may, as faithful servants, increase that which they have received and hand over to their Lord through the hands of those who come after them his own with due increase.